

## **Opening Statement for the Honorable Brett Guthrie**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

### **“Preparing for and Responding to Future Public Health Security Threats”**

**May 11, 2023**

Before we begin, I want to note that today marks the official end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The expiration of the public health emergency comes after more than a year of Republicans on this committee calling for the unwinding of the COVID-19 public health emergency and months since the People’s House voted to end the COVID-19 public health emergency. While I believe this should have happened a long time ago, I am glad that we are moving beyond this perpetual emergency declaration.

Today also marks the end of Title 42 policy. I am extremely concerned about the flow of illicit fentanyl and other drugs coming into our communities from our Southern Border. Especially without Title 42 in place, more needs to be done to address the ease at which illicit fentanyl is being trafficked into our communities, which H.R. 2, the Secure the Border Act, would help to address.

As for today's hearing, we are continuing our bipartisan efforts to prepare and respond more effectively to future public health security threats, including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, cyberattacks, or another infectious disease outbreak. This is the third hearing the Energy and Commerce Committee has held in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress related to our response framework.

We now have a unique chance to look back and ask ourselves what worked, what failed, and identify bipartisan solutions on how we can improve. We should not use this as a chance to point fingers or lay blame. Instead, today's focus should be on the core elements of our preparedness and response strategy to address all types of hazards. Several key programs and authorities that are crucial to U.S. preparedness and response will expire on September 30. **These are the programs we are examining and considering today.**

One area ripe for improvement is ensuring we are better utilizing the expertise of our private sector partners to be better positioned to respond to future threats. For example, the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention did not have contracts with testing kit manufacturers until after the declaration of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. This presented significant challenges when attempting to stand up a nationwide testing scheme at the beginning of the pandemic. It caused delays in the delivery of supplies, negatively impacted patient care, and caused challenges in grasping the full extent of the spread when time was crucial. Conversely, Operation Warp Speed was a successful private-public partnership, and should be viewed as a model going forward.

Fortunately, we have already taken steps to make reforms and restore trust in our core public health agencies. As part of the end of year omnibus, we improved the Strategic National Stockpile and put measures in place to hold our public agencies, such as the CDC and NIH, more accountable. This includes strengthening research integrity protocols at NIH and requiring Senate confirmation of the CDC director.

We must continue to build off this work by advancing policies to ensure our public health agencies are focused on their core missions.

One of those agencies is the Administration for Strategic Pandemic Response (ASPR). ASPR announced last year it is moving from a staffing division to an operating division. I recognize ASPR and this Administration is requesting new authorities in response to this change. However, before this committee can consider expanding the scope of this agency, we need to look strategically at how ASPR handled this most recent public health emergency, the effectiveness of its response, and determine if its already existing current authorities were utilized appropriately.

In closing, public health security is national security. This committee will ensure we are better prepared when the next public health security threat strikes. I look forward to hearing the testimony from the Administration and expert witnesses today and working alongside my colleagues on addressing these issues in a bipartisan manner.